DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 250 293 SP 025 571

AUTHOR Robinson, Sharon B.
TITLE Toward a More Desirable Profession.
INSTITUTION National Education Association, Washington, D.C. Div. of Instruction and Professional Development.
SPONS AGENCY National Commission on Excellence in Teacher Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Oct 84
NOTE 21p.; Seminar paper presented at a Hearing of the National Commission on Excellence in Teacher Education (Austin, TX, October 4-5, 1984). For related documents, see SP 025 564-595.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Improvement; Family School Relationship; Higher Education; Principals; *Professional Autonomy; *Professional Recognition; Relevance (Education); *Teacher Education Programs; Teacher Evaluation; Teacher Salaries; *Teaching (Occupation)
IDENTIFIERS National Commission on Excellence in Teacher Educ

ABSTRACT

Reform of teacher education must be based on substantial emphasis on the liberal arts and major academic disciplines, and rigorous admission and graduation requirements. The professional curriculum must be relevant to the world of teaching and learning. Teachers are now being prepared for a world of professional practice that should not exist; teaching and learning conditions in the schools undermine the teaching profession and frustrate productivity and credibility. Five conditions require immediate consideration and action: (1) greater autonomy of local school faculty and decentralization of substantial authority to the persons close to the students; (2) a new model of the school as a clinic, laboratory, and research and development center housing a group of knowledgeable workers, with high expectations not only for students but also for their parents; (3) more emphasis on teacher evaluation, which should be a joint effort with teachers and administrators working together; (4) stronger leadership by the school principal; and (5) teacher salaries which are commensurate with those of comparable professions. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

INSTRUCTION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Sharon P. Robinson, Director

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION • 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, D C 20036 • (202) 822-7350
MARY HATWOOD FUTRELL, President
KEITH GEIGER, Vice President
ROXANNE E. BRADSHAW, Secretary-Treasurer
DON CAMERON, Executive Director

ED250293

Statement by Sharon P. Robinson before the
National Commission on Excellence in Teacher Education
Austin, Texas; October 4, 1984

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Toward A More Desirable Profession

A profession is founded on the assumption that its members know what the world is like. In this process, members of a profession come to share a particular view of the world. A profession develops its own paradigms -- models or patterns -- for dealing with the problems its practitioners must face.

Another tenet of professiongraphy is that a profession tends to become rigid with age. This condition is reflected in a dictionary definition of professionalism: "extreme competence in an occupation or pursuit sometimes marked by absence of originality." Kenneth Lynn has observed that "for all their vitality

Dr. Robinson is director of instruction and professional development for the National Education Association, Washington, D. C.

SP 025 571

and daring receptivity to new ideas, the American professions are enormously conservative when it comes to changing the club rules."

One reason for this conservatism within a profession may be that its established paradigm controls the criteria for choosing the problems with which the profession will concern itself.

Such a paradigm, therefore, can insulate a profession from those socially important problems that cannot be stated in terms of the conceptual and instrumental tools the existing professional paradigm supplies.

In fact, a scientific revolution has been described by Thomas S. Kuhn in his book, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1970), as the replacement of one paradigm by another. Examples of this can be seen in well-known episodes of scientific development that have often been labeled revolutions and associated with such names as Copernicus, Newton, and Einstein.

Each of these important events necessitated the rejection of one time-honored scientific theory in favor of another incompatible with it.

Each event -- and according to Kuhn, there have been many of them -- "produced a consequent shift in the problems available for scientific scrutiny and in the standards by which the profession determined what should count as an admissible problem or as a legitimate problem-solution." Such changes, says Kuhn, "are the

defining characteristics of scientific revolutions."

How clearly can this phenomenon be seen in teacher education programs, in our professional literature, and in the changing fashions of educational research?

Perhaps we should face up to another difficult question. In modern times, has the teaching profession experienced what could be described as a revolution in terms of theory and practice?

And, if such revolution were to begin, would we in the profession recognize it as such?

The question might be restated this way: Can the teaching profession reform itself?

If professional self-reformation is possible -- and we think it is or we would not be here -- then it must be based on self-understanding and self-examination; a self-examination that is clinical, objective, and multi-dimensional.

We must learn to see ourselves as others see us. We must also find new ways of conceptualizing our mission -- with old models as well as with new ones. Model theory today tends to merge with metaphor theory to the extent that a metaphor may be seen as a model for changing our way of looking at things, of perceiving the world. All of us who teach must understand that it is only through metaphors that we can deal with the future.

One useful view of the profession came from Bob Howsam recently (1982). He described three closely related but separate functional units characteristic of several professions in the area of human services:

1. The institutions that bring together clients and practitioners for the performance of professional services, i. e., schools, hospitals, courts.

2. The institutions that make the professional services available, i. e., teaching profession, medical profession, legal profession.

3. The institutions that prepare practitioners and have primary responsibility for research and development, i. e., colleges of education, law, and medicine.

In the Howsam model each of the three institutions has overlapping but more or less clear allocations of responsibility. In a series of understatements, Howsam points out that the three sectors of the profession "proceed from different assumptions and are far from agreement." It is here he tells us -- with tongue in cheek, I presume -- that "collaboration and mutual trust are not pervasive."

One value of the Howsam model is that it can serve as a special viewfinder -- a prism if not a kaleidoscope -- a device which makes it possible for us to view, from different perspectives within

the profession so to speak, the growing number of recommendations for school reform.

Howsam also tells us that in his triumvirate of professional loci "the status of professional schools largely reflects the status of the profession.

Within the Howsam triumvirate of schools, teachers, and teacher education, we find, in reality, close interrelationships defined by many bonds of common concern. More often than not, then, enlightened self-interest increasingly indicates mutual support and cooperation among these groups.

It may be for this reason that teachers anticipated the present ground swell of educational reform. For example, ten months before the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued its report, the National Education Association published a detailed blueprint for major reform of teacher education.

In this report we called for substantial emphasis on the liberal arts and a major in an academic discipline, rigorous admission and graduation requirements for the professional program. We also called for a professional curriculum relevant to the world of teaching and learning as well as stringent measures of accountability.

Three generic functions were identified: facilitating learning, managing the classroom, making professional decisions. Five "families of standards" were developed against which professional

programs can be judged. We have, of course, discussed all of this with AACTE and with other groups within the teacher education community. Copies of this NEA teacher education proposal are available here today.

Our proposals for fundamental reform can make a significant difference in the quality of schooling. Obviously, we feel that the teacher is central to any discussion of quality education. For now, I simply want you to understand our involvement in -- and our commitment to -- improving teacher education programs. And, incidentally, we are of the opinion that teacher education is already getting better. This, despite the current demographics of despair.

To put it another way: teacher education -- in spite of Ms. Feistritzer's (1984) comments to the contrary -- is improving markedly. We used to complain that we prepared teachers for a world that didn't exist. Let me stiffen that criticism: we are now preparing teachers for a world of professional practice that <u>should not</u> exist. Teaching and learning conditions that exist in schools today do not serve anyone well -- taxpayers, legislators, school board members, administrators, parents -- especially students. These sad conditions undermine our profession and our entire enterprise by thoroughly frustrating productivity and thereby credibility. None of us escapes indictment.

Five of those conditions require our immediate consideration and action. Teachers tell us that unless some action is taken on

these matters, all of the federal and state efforts to reform schooling are doomed to failure.

The first of these, and perhaps the most important, has to do with decision-making. There simply has got to be considerably greater autonomy for the faculty of the local school. Ernest Boyer tells us that "whatever is wrong with American public schools, it cannot be fixed without the help of those teachers already in the classroom."

This faculty autonomy will be required both as a part of the needed reform but even more importantly as an essential characteristic of the new schools -- the schools that will be a result of the coming pedagogical renaissance to be brought about by reasonable adaptation of the research on effective schools and on effective teaching.

Sizer (1984) says it best when he points out (p. 195) that some abysmal teaching flows -- not always from poor teachers -- but from the "the conditions of work" -- giving rise to Horace's Compromise.

Reversing this direction will be difficult, but Sizer also observes that, "As effective teaching absolutely requires substantial autonomy, the decentralizing of substantial authority to the persons close to the students is essential."

Evidence on the effectiveness of decentralized schools is considerable. A recent review of this literature (Purkey and

Smith, 1982) reports that "in attempting to build more effective schools we must abandon our reliance on facile solutions and the assumption that fundamental change can be brought about from the top down. Instead, a more promising notion rests on the conception of schools as functioning social systems with distinctive cultures in which the improvement effort is directed toward incremental long-term cultural change."

"Downtown" continues to set goals, but decisions over how teacher student time is organized, the materials and approaches used, and the way staff is deployed must be at the school building level.

A second condition of work for teachers will involve a new model -- a new metaphor, if you will -- of the school building as a kind of clinic, laboratory, R and D Center; a kind of think tank housing a group of knowledge workers. The school as a place where the primary purpose is learning. A place where purpose and goals are clearly understood by everyone: students, parents, teachers, support staff, as well as administrators. A place where everyone has high expectations and respect for students, and where -- in the process -- students hold themselves in respect and consequently raise their own performance standards.

In such an environment we find a culture based on common purpose, self-respect, and caring -- some factors that are too often missing in schools as they are conducted today.

In such a building climate student learning will be characterized by mastery of what is taught -- demonstrated grasp of the fundamentals, competent use of skills, command over a subject -- not mere passing grades. Mastery as the standard of excellence with schools organizing time and providing resources for this purpose.

Here also the student will be seen as an active participant in learning -- high expectations for student performance, learning activities designed to improve student initiative, questioning and exploration -- not just the possible recovery and giving back of information, learning environment free of disruptive behavior.

Parents and home life will play a very large role in what students bring to school as their contribution to the social and learning climate of their classroom. Here the most recent survey data indicate that teachers consider the most crucial problem facing local public schools is lack of parental support, not lack of discipline.

The Gallup Poll released earlier this week (Phi Delta Kappan, October 1984) indicates that American teachers do not think today's parents of schoolchildren are doing a good job as such. Only one teacher in five (21 percent) gave parents an A or a B for their efforts. A larger percentage of teachers (31 percent) gave parents a D or an F for the job they're doing.

Finally -- and in many ways most important of all -- is the matter of equity. Equity will be served well in this kind of a

climate. What do we mean by equity: "Full learning opportunity for all students -- varied and appropriate learning opportunities available for all individuals to realize their potential, irrespective of economic, social, physical, or psychological condition." Teachers and other NEA members developed this description of schools (Futrell, 1984) and the conditions which support professional practice. These conditions of work would make the profession more desirable to us all.

A third condition of work requiring immediate consideration has to do with the evaluation of teacher performance. I want to quote to you from the NEA's report on Excellence In Our Schools which was adopted last July -- it has to do with evaluating professional performance:

> "We insist that there be a competent teacher in every classroom and a competent administrator in every school. There is only one way to achieve this goal: Every school district must establish a comprehensive system of personnel evaluation.
>
> We are tired of excuses from school officials, (said the teachers who wrote this report). They must start implementing meaningful evaluation programs. No tenure law prevents a school district from evaluating teachers and administrators. No education association can force -- or wants to

force -- a school district to retain an incompetent educator. What teachers want is fair, competent, and regular evaluation of the jobs they do. For such an evaluation system to be effective, teachers also want procedural guarantees and due process. But no evaluation system can succeed without trained evaluators. School districts must carefully train all administrators in the evaluation system that has been designed for their school staff."

Our commitment to that recommendation is supported by a substantial NEA investment in a comprehensive study of evaluation systems. This will be of interest to policymakers and the profession in their search for acceptable systems.

We are interested here in such questions as peer review, administrators in-class observation, simulation, and so on. Your suggestions will be most welcome. At the same time, we are interested in looking at established and functioning standards for suceessful personnel evaluation programs.

In a recent -- and unreleased -- NEA teacher opinion survey, 92 percent felt that the design of such a teacher evaluation system should be a joint effort with teachers and administrators working together.

82 percent of our members tell us that they are evaluated annually. That is the good news. The bad news is that more than

50 percent of our members tell us that the evaluation process and outcome have nothing to do with their teaching. I mean the administrator comes in and does a checklist and there is no relationship between what is on that checklist and what that administrator says either then or at the follow-up conference about what is to be done. Too often evaluation is simply a threatening administrative requirement; if we wish to make the profession more desirable, evaluation must be a part of an on-going responsibility and commitment to continual professional growth.

A fourth condition can perhaps best be described as the role of the building principal as a leader; one who sets the pedagogical climate control for the school. Clearly this will do a great deal toward making a more desirable profession.

In this department everything is not as would like it to be. In our recent survey, 34 percent of the teachers indicated that their principal "does not exert strong administrative leadership." In the just-published Gallup Poll of teachers, 54 percent of teachers grade administrators as a C, D, or F only -- 10 percent say A.

In this same NEA survey, 29 percent of the teachers polled said they were dissatisfied with the support they received from their principal, and 34 percent indicated that, in their school, "professional relationships between teachers and administrators did not indicate mutual respect."

Another unreleased study, and in my view an important one, indicates that teachers in Los Angeles City have one thing in their minds when they are told or asked to transfer to another school -- most people would say it would have to do with the safety of that environment or the nature of the kids that are there and the kind of satisfaction that one gets from the relationships with youngsters who like to go to school. What matters is the quality of the principalship -- they will follow a good principal anywhere.

Only 25 percent of the principals in Los Angeles were followed according to the teachers -- 75 percent of the principals in Los Angeles are seen by their teachers as incompetent. All of us must look for ways in which we can work together for stronger leadership and management at the building level.

Commissioned by the United Teachers of Los Angeles, the study grew from a desire on the part of the union (UTLA) to document the conditions of schools in which their members teach, to survey teacher perceptions with regard to reassignment to another school, and to assess the range of acceptable conditions for transferring to another school.

Finally, my fifth condition has to do with salary -- the fiscal environment in which teachers must work.

Without getting into a statistical thicket, some numbers will perhaps illustrate the dimensions of this "condition." In 1984

the average beginning salary for teachers is: $14,500; construction workers begin at $23,126; librarians at $19,344; laboratory technicians at $17,761; accountants at $20,484; bus drivers (in Washington, D.C.) at $22,906.

The figure for beginning teachers -- let me say it one more time -- $14,500.

For teachers with experience this figure does go up. In fact, the average classroom teacher salary for 1983-84 is $22,019. A figure that is lower than beginning salaries for bus drivers and construction workers.

In order to attract and retain the best teachers, salaries for teachers must be commensurate with those of comparable professions -- NEA policy calls for a starting salary for teachers of no less than $24,000 with raises equivalent to those in comparable professions. If you want fundamental reform in the schools, we must begin by raising teacher salaries across the board.

The Rhetoric of Reform

A little over a year ago the need for educational reform was couched in an aquatic metaphor. It was described as "a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people."

Over the past year this bit of well-worn hydraulic hyperhole has become symbolic of an unprecedented interest in the improvement of American education. What began as a rather fluid federal report has now trickled down to where it can be felt -- if not always absorbed -- by every school board member in the land.

Today we are embarked on what might be called a second wave of reports and recommendations to improve schools. We now have reports on the reports and reports on what to do about the reports. Nearly 300 second generation reports have been identified recently at the state level.

Information about educational reform has become a growing industry both inside and outside the education community. Much of this information -- especially the second generation reports on the reports -- is redundant, misleading, and even wrong. But it does by and large serve to increase public awareness, and news media exposure, of a number of very serious and interrelated problems -- social political, and economic -- now facing the nation. Public awareness and news media exposure, of course, are the stuff from which images are made, and it seems to me that within all of this attention to education there is a great opportunity for all of us to improve the public image of the teacher.

Such a high degree of popular interest, of course, can be a healthy sign. But public interest can also be a popularity contest. Like Nielson ratings, pop songs, best selling books, and Michael Jackson gloves, such measurements often reflect little more than

effective media manipulation. Certainly this kind of data is seldom the stuff on which policy decisions can be based -- decisions, for example, concerning directions for scientific research, foreign policy development, or stating clearly the goals of education.

We may already have reached a point where our educational policy is being set by commercial television networks. Last month, for example, ABC News gave us a three-hour report on education. During this Tuesday evening prime-time program, we were told that public schools must solve the latchkey problem.

I hesitate to belabor this example, but I would like to call attention to something Bob Cole said in the September Phi Delta Kappan: Most institutions, says Cole, "can't replace the functions of families. Teaching the basics is one thing; bringing up a child is entirely different. We have every right to demand that schools teach -- and teach very well indeed. For the rest, we must look to ourselves."

To what degree are the news media directly influencing the development of educational policy today?

At a time when all of us are awash in a sea of electronic images; at a time when our elections are won or lost on the candidate's ability as a television performer, it may be that we would do well to give more attention to some of the emerging relationships between television and education.

Is it possible to be television literate?

For that matter, is it possible to be a television illiterate?

The relationship between teaching conditions and the mass media of electronic communications strikes me as a rich area for image building and for research on image building. Clearly, the conditions under which classroom teachers must work are, to an important degree, related to -- and influenced by -- the image of teachers and teaching that is to be found in the mind's eye of the public. Further, it seems obvious that any increase in public respect for teachers and the teaching profession will depend on the public view of, and understanding of, what teachers do. After all, respect is the most important psychic reward for teachers. And today in our land respect is shaped by the media of communication.

How accurately do these media report on the development of tional policy? Or, for that matter, how difficult is it for the public to get accurate and balanced reports on education in a particular community? What are the effects of covering school board meetings on radio, television, or cable?

When teachers are pictured on TV (either as dramatic or as documentary characters), what community values are attached to these images? There has, of course, been important work done on some of these questions, but much of this type of research is not very popular just now, particularly in the realm of educational research. To the degree that schools of education can influence or control the directions taken by education research, more emphasis

on some of these "image-media" problems may have a profound effect on making teaching a more desirable profession.

One difficulty with the image of schooling in the mind's eye of the public is the fact that all adults have spent many years in school as students. As time goes by, these adult images become brittle and increasingly difficult to change. Meanwhile, in the real day-to-day world of schools and children, the rate of change accelerates -- the kids are different, the teachers are different; everything is very different. But the image of the schools in the public's mind tends to be fixed on a time past.

Research

Perhaps the research which supports the practice of a profession can be viewed as a kind of measure of the intellectual health of that profession. One might even say that its research is the mirror of a profession. With this in mind, let me say how pleased I am to see such books as Sara Lawrence Lightfoot's The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture and Ted Sixer's Horace's Compromise. Both books report a kind of research that is unusual in the annuals of educational research, representing as they do a kind of ethonographic humanistic view of the teaching process. There are some rare early examples of this. Phil Jackson's Life in Classrooms comes to mind.

Such research reports as these are elegant indications that research on the process of education may be -- at long last --

divorcing itself from the sterile scientism of psychometrics. It seems to me that research such as this -- Lightfoot, et. al -- will make all of us in the profession stand a little taller.

Another research area we seem to neglect at our own peril is comparative education. Here we are, living in a global village with more than 20 other high technology societies; each of them with comparable systems of free public schools; each of them with organized teaching professions; each of them with comparable cultural problems. It seems that when we ignore comparative education, we comdemn ourselves to reinventing the wheel. And in the process, we do not make teaching as desirable a profession as it might otherwise be.

Finally, I would suggest that we watch our language. Of course, a specialized vocabulary is one characteristic of a profession. Jargon is something else. Many teachers I know would find this a more desirable profession if they were not subjected to the something less than good English usage which characterizes an embarrassing amount of the education literature.

One is reminded of the comically fallacious sylogism that runs something like this: Profound reasoning is difficult to understand; this work is difficult to understand: therefore this work is profound.

As a profession, we really should clean up our language. If we are more easily understood, we will enhance our image and public

confidence in the enterprise of education.

In conclusion, let me say how pleased I am to be with you today. Reports from your recent Minneapolis hearings indicate those of us here today have a high standard to meet. I understand that Bunny Smith, Marty Haberman, Ken Howey and Harry Judge all gave you thoughtful advice.

A rational base, however, is not enough. In fact, it is only a beginning of the job ahead of us. Education has become politicized as never before. At the same time, education has never before been as necessary for a successful adult life. These facts account for the number of reform proposals and for the high public interest in all this.

References

Feistritzer, C. Emily The Making of A Teacher: A Report on Teacher Education and Certification. National Center for Education Information, 1984. 64 pp.

Futrell, Mary Hatwood "An Open Letter to America On Schools, Students, and Tomorrow," NEA Today, October 1984, pp. 15-18.

Howsam, Robert B. "Higher Education, the Teaching Profession and the School System," NCSIE Inservice, August 1982, pp. 7-10.

Kuhn, Thomas S. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. University of Chicago Press, 1970. 210 pp.

Purkey, S. C. and Smith, M. S. Effective Schools -- A Review. Wisconsin Center for Education Research, September 1982.

Sizer, Theodore R. Horace's Compromuse: The Dilemma of the American High School. Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984, 241 pp.